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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, November 15, 1933.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Health Swindles." Information from the Food and Drug Administration,
U. S. D. A.

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We all get fooled now and then. April Fool's Day sometimes catches us unaware. The shrewdest business man occasionally has one put over on him in a sham deal. The smartest shopper now and then is taken in by clever sales talk and makes a bad purchase. Of course, an experience like this isn't pleasant, but generally it does us no serious harm -- just makes us resolve to laugh it off and be more cautious next time.

But sometimes a swindle is no laughing matter. Sometimes a fraud means ruin for the man at the wrong end of the deal. For example, health swindles are rarely jokes. Perhaps the meanest cheats alive are those who prey on sick people, who persuade sufferers to part with their good money for quack medicines and fake cures. None of us would willingly stand by and watch a shyster trick a consumptive or a diabetic or a person ill with cancer into giving his money for a worthless or even harmful quack medicine. A scene like that would make us call the police and ask to have the law on such a heartless swindler.

But that wouldn't do a bit of good at present. We haven't any law now that prevents advertising fake medicines and persuading poor people to buy and dose themselves with them. This kind of swindling is going on every day around us. It's a very profitable business. People who might recover by proper treatment are beguiled by persuasive advertising to buy and take some remedy that does them no good and keeps them from the treatment that might cure them. No telling how many people lose their lives each year by depending on worthless preparations.

Let me tell you one story to prove it.

Back in 1922 the Government brought action against a fake remedy for tuberculosis called "B & M." This preparation started life as a horse liniment. The scientists who analyzed it found that it was essentially ammonia, turpentine, eggs and water. The label claimed that it was helpful in cases of tuberculosis and pneumonia. The Government brought action against the product and easily proved that its claims were false by the testimony of physicians specializing in tuberculosis. But the Government couldn't prove that the manufacturer knew his claims were untrue. He brought witnesses to court who said the stuff had cured them. He produced testimonials to the same effect. So the Government lost the case. But Food and Drug inspectors went right on investigating for the next ten years. During that time they collected the death certificates of many of the witnesses who had appeared in court as cures and of the writers of testimonials.

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Finally, they found a case where the manufacturer paid for some testimonials. So the Government won its second case and the manufacturer had to change the label on his product. However, the product is still on the market.

Let me give you an illustration of how this fake remedy affected one family. Back in 1924 three sisters -- Margaret, Elizabeth and Martha Allen, all ill with tuberculosis, went to the Rhode Island Tuberculosis Sanatorium for treatment. While there, Margaret heard about this so-called "consumptive cure" -- "B & M." Advertisements and testimonials declared that the medicine was a positive cure for tuberculosis. Margaret wanted to try it, but the authorities at the sanatorium refused to let her use a quack remedy. So she left the institution and went home to try out this "cure." She believed that the medicine was helping her. So she persuaded her two sisters also to come home and take it. Martha Allen died after taking "B & M" for four months. The second sister, Elizabeth, used the stuff about the same length of time, found herself definitely worse, and returned to the sanatorium such an advanced case that she died in three months. Margaret, whose case was only in the early stages when she left the sanatorium, who might very probably have recovered there, returned after taking "B & M" for a year, far advanced in illness. The Food and Drug inspectors found plenty of other cases of people who had been victimized by this worthless remedy. They have in their files sixty-four death certificates of people who used the remedy to cure their tuberculosis. You can get an idea of the number of trusting people who have been deceived by this one preparation by the profits of the business. The gross sales of this fake were more than \$100,000 annually for several years and in one year they reached a peak of \$367,000 -- all money from poor people who trusted the persuasive words of the manufacturer and hoped to cure themselves with his remedy.

This is just one example of the health swindles that are being put over on sick people these days because of the loopholes in our present Food and Drug law. I told you last week about the exhibit of frauds and fakes now on display at the Food and Drug Administration in Washington, D. C. There you can see a great variety of health swindles now for sale -- some of them worthless, some of them actually harmful. You can see in that exhibit a radium water, truthfully labeled yet deadly perilous to your life, if clever advertising induces you to take it to cure your ills. You can see anti-fat remedies, containing dangerous drugs, that can ruin your health. In that display is a rubber tube that looks like a tin whistle. It sells for a good price as a tuberculosis cure. You are advised to blow in it to develop your lungs and prevent consumption.

Then, you'll see a package of common, ordinary, everyday Glauber's salts-- the laxative used for horses -- sold as some special crystals with a fancy name at a fancy price and advertised as a cure for stomach, liver and kidney disorders.

I could go on for hours telling you about such swindles that people are buying every day. But I won't because I want to call your attention to a more hopeful side of the case -- a new bill now up before Congress that will close the loopholes in our present law. The new law will protect the good patent medicines now on the market. It will let you know what you're buying when you want to doctor yourself at home. And it will regulate advertising and save you and me from being swindled by fakes.

If you want further information on this new Copeland Bill, write either to this station or direct to the Food and Drug Administration at Washington, D.C.
Tomorrow: "Buying Pillows."

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